



NEWS RELEASE

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For Additional Information

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El Camino Real Plan Available for Public Comment

SOCORRO – A Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) environmental study and a BLM management plan amendment for the proposed \$4.4 million El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro International Heritage Center is available for public review and comment, according to BLM-Socorro Field Manager Kate Padilla and Dr. Edson Way, New Mexico Cultural Affairs Officer.

The Resource Management Plan Amendment/Environmental Assessment (RMPA/EA) was conducted by the BLM and OCA, consulting with local, state and federal agencies. The document provides analyses and considerations that will be used to make decisions about the proposed center and a 120-acre site that would include a 15,000-square-foot museum, parking lot, staff residence, trails and road improvements.

The RMPA/EA details the potential environmental effect of the proposed center, including alternatives for managing surrounding public lands. The document includes comments made in April 2000 at public meetings in Socorro and Truth or Consequences.

Upon final approval, 120 acres of federally managed land about 35 miles south of Socorro, 40 miles north of Truth or Consequences and about 3 ½ miles east of I-25 would be transferred to the State of New Mexico for the joint construction and management of a BLM and New Mexico interpretative center.

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The State of New Mexico has committed \$1.7 million, and congress has designated \$2.7 million for the project south of the Bosque del Apache, according to Charles Carroll, a BLM-Socorro archeologist.

The Socorro County site was one of nine considered during a feasibility study directed by the New Mexico State Monuments Division and a citizens' advisory board.

Final recommendations were based on 31 selection criteria for potential sites and were published in *El Viaje: A Planning Study for the Camino Real Interpretive Center*, distributed in January 1994 by Architectural Research Consultants Inc. The site-selection study was funded in part by communities along the lower Rio Grande: Los Lunas, \$2,000; Belen, \$2,000; Socorro, \$8,000; Truth or Consequences, \$4,000, and Las Cruces \$8,000.

The RMPA/EA is available on the Internet at www.nm.blm.gov. A limited number of printed copies will be available for review at BLM field offices in Socorro, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces. For additional information write the Bureau of Land Management, 198 Neel St., Socorro, NM 87801, or call 505/835-0412.

In October 2000, Congress and the President designated the El Camino Real a National Historic Trail.

"The proposed heritage center site was specifically selected to provide the public a sense of the remote landscape experienced by the original Native American and Hispanic travelers who followed the river from Mexico to Taos," according New Mexico State Rep. Don Tripp.

Views from the proposed heritage center are within a 150-degree arc, beginning on the northeast at Mesa Contradero (Black Mesa, about 10 miles away), and continuing east, southeast and then almost due south toward the Fra Cristóbal Mountains, where the Jornada del Muerto (Journey of Death) returned to the Rio Grande, about 7 miles below the site.

The 120-acre site is in Township 8 South, Range 3 West, in portions of Sections 24 and 25. Access is from I-25, Exit 115, then south on NM 1 (parallel to I-25) to Socorro County 255, east of the I-25 Fort Craig Rest Stop.

Socorro County, Sierra County and the Cities of Socorro and Truth or Consequences have active programs supporting the growth of tourism in central New Mexico, according to Socorro Mayor Ravi Bhasker.

“A long-term goal is to develop local and regional education and cultural tourism plans for the communities who participated in the original siting and feasibility study,” Bhasker said.

Bhasker said the center is intended to lead in developing programs with communities such as Los Lunas, Belen, Socorro, Truth or Consequences, Las Cruces and El Paso, and may include satellite centers or displays in other relevant locations.

The proposed center also is significant in international plans, involving possible traveling exhibits and other elements such as educational programs conducted through agreements with Mexico and Spain. The BLM has existing agreements with the archeological and historical branch of the Mexican government that could facilitate sharing educational information and products for the center, according to the RMPA/EA.

The building design is oriented on the site to “point” to the Camino Real, in the middle-distance across the Rio Grande, with a commanding view of the east bank of the river and eastern horizon. The linear structure is designed to have little impact on existing grading because the lower level of the two-story structure would be partially below grade, according to the RMPA/EA.

A service drive will connect County Road 255 to the west side of the center. All facilities are designed to be handicap accessible.

If the project is approved, construction could start in the fall of 2001, and the Center could begin attracting an estimated 60,000 visitors per year in following years.